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C O N F I D E N T I A L SECTION 01 OF 02 ABUJA 002932

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TAGS: [PREL](#) [CASC](#) [PGOV](#) [SOCI](#) [KDEM](#) [NI](#)

SUBJECT: NIGERIA: VIOLENCE FLARES AGAIN IN JOS; PART OF A
CONTINUING TREND IN PLATEAU STATE.

REF: ABUJA 2809

CLASSIFIED BY AMBASSADOR HOWARD F. JETER. REASONS 1.5 (B) AND
(D).

1. (SBU) Summary: Communal violence continued to plague parts of Plateau State, including areas of the capital Jos. Initial reports from Amcits resident there indicated spill-over violence in Jos after at least 10 were killed in the nearby village of Maza. Military troops have restored order to the area but the atmosphere remains tense and violence can rekindle quickly. According to our sources, no Amcits have been injured or even involved in the violence. End Summary.

Recent Violence

2. (SBU) The morning of October 23, Post received reports of violence in Jos from Amcits living in the city. Apparently, fighting had broken out in Maza village, northeast of Jos. According to media reports the village was "attacked" during the night of October 22. The attackers were reported to be armed with automatic weapons and bows with poison arrows. Governor Joshua Dariye of Plateau State ordered security forces to use lethal force in order to quell the violence. It took security forces 2 hours to subdue the attackers. Newspapers report that 88 suspects, mostly Fulani and some foreigners were arrested. Gabriel Makan, personal assistant to the governor, blamed foreign "mercenaries" for other recent attacks in Plateau State. There is some speculation that Nigerian and Chadian outlaws have participated.

3.(U) Comment: For many years criminal bands comprised of Nigerian, Chadian and Nigerian elements have operated in Northern Nigeria, particularly in the corridor encompassing Borno, Bauchi, Gombe and Yobe States. At times these bands have struck in Plateau State. If reports of criminal participation in these acts are true it seems that their presence in Plateau is much more pronounced than in the past. Part of the reason may be they have had to expand their circle of operation due to diminishing returns elsewhere. However, some of the information received indicates that feuding ethnic groups and villages may be hiring these outlaws in hopes of gaining the upper hand against their rivals. The injection of these criminals will make local disputes more violent and harder to contain. End Comment.)

4. (U) Both media and Amcits reported that when the victims' bodies were transported from Maza to Jos, people became upset when they saw the dead. Their agitation sparked a disturbance in Jos itself, which was quickly subdued by security forces. Another report indicated that the turmoil was also linked to street-side traders being forced to move some of their make-shift business locations. Gabriel Makan reported similar action by the State Government had led to rioting earlier this month.

5. (SBU) Amcit heard reports of trucks loaded with troops entering the affected areas in Jos, followed by reports that fighting had stopped. The situation, however, remained tense. Amcit also reported that there was significantly reduced vehicular traffic in Jos, even during the normal rush hour. Unconfirmed reports claimed that schools had been closed.

6. (U) At approximately 9:00 AM October 23 the Plateau State Governor, Joshua Dariye, reported via State radio that there had been an attack on a village near Jos and that 3 people had been killed, but the situation was under control. (Note: Media reports now claim 10 were killed; underreporting of

casualties by state officials is common. End Note.) He further stated "there is reasonable peace" in the city of Jos and that there was no need for panic. The Governor repeated a similar message every 10 minutes, appealing for calm. By 11:00 a.m. Amcit reported that there was still little traffic on the road, but he heard or saw no further evidence of violence.

Background to the Crisis

17. (U) The October 23 report is the most recent in a series of violent incidents that have flared in Plateau State.

18. (SBU) On October 2 in Jos, Conoff observed a row of medium sized Nigerian Army tents pitched along the roadside of the border between Christian and Muslim sections of town. Each tent appeared to house 8-12 Nigerian Army soldiers who were in full combat uniform and armed with AK-47 assault rifles.

19. (C) Gabriel Makan reported that many of the outbreaks could be traced to competing claims over cattle herds and land. Several outbreaks of violence have occurred when herders attempted to reclaim cattle. If the herder could not find his own animals, he would take a corresponding number from another herd. The wronged owner would retaliate and violence would begin again. Perhaps more worrisome, Makan indicated that several attacks have been carried out by Muslim Fulani raiders on non-Muslim villages. While these attacks were probably due to competition over local resources, the identities of the rural groups lends both ethnic and religious overtones to the violence. Makan claimed that several raiders had been apprehended and killed. The Plateau State Government claimed these raiders were mercenaries from outside Plateau State, with some coming from Chad and Niger.

Comment

10. (SBU) Order has been established after the latest violence but many Plateau residents fear the calm is tenuous and dependent on visible military deployments in the troubled areas. The unfortunate confluence of divergent ethnic groups and the competition for land and livestock inherent at the level of subsistence farming that is common throughout much of Plateau State, indicates the eruption of communal violence will continue to be one of the State's major challenges in the near term.

11. (SBU) While Plateau State may not be able to end the outbreaks, it must do its best to contain them. By deploying strong and adequate law enforcement and working with community leaders, the Plateau State Government should be able to minimize the participation of criminal bands lest violence in Plateau escalate again to the levels we have witnessed in the recent past.

JETER